

*Advice for
care leavers...*

...from a care leaver

Mohammed Rahman



*A man who
lacks purpose
distracts himself
with pleasure.*



Institute for
Global Prosperity



Citizen Science
Academy





My name is Mohammed and I am a young British Bangladeshi who grew up in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, and a citizen social scientist. In this zine I'm going to tell you a bit of myself and my experiences as a young care leaver.

To explain a bit more, a 'care leaver' is someone who has experience being in care before the age of eighteen. Once you have turned eighteen, and until the age of twenty-five, you are classed as a care leaver which means you will get supported from a personal advisor instead of a social worker. Your local council is your 'corporate parent' and until you reach twenty-five they still have responsibility to support you depending on your circumstances and situation.

My childhood was so disorganised, as from being toddler to my teenage years I have never really received the support that I needed. I grew up in a household without a father figure and my mother didn't have much support except for her sisters. There was a big language barrier which had a huge impact - my mother didn't know where to get help when I used to misbehave in school and get into trouble with the police quite often.

This has led me to go into care due to my misbehaving outside, and getting into serious trouble. This made me get very nervous about the track I was going down with my life, and to avoid it getting worse I asked to put me in care for a short time. I am saying this honestly because I'm now through this and want to show that you can get past bad times also.

My life has dramatically changed over the years due to many reasons. The reason why I joined this project as a citizen science researcher was because the programme is for "Act Early" which focuses on young people. The course became quite interesting to me as it went on and I ended up choosing to focus my research on interviewing social workers about how they work with young people and support wellbeing. I am motivated to work along with young people and am hoping I can one day become a personal advisor as this is my goal.

My personal advisor has helped me and supported me to improve in my lifestyle and I want to give back to other young people and help them as much as I can to meet their goals.

During this project I have done eight interviews, two conducted remotely, doing a survey with them, and the rest in-person at a location convenient for them. Some were kind enough to allow me to voice record them during the interview which was really helpful for me, and I thank them for their consent.

Once I gathered all my data and notes from the interviews I decided to make a zine and audio documentary containing the key points I have learned. Three of the social workers have been so lovely by allowing me to use their voice in the audio documentary and everyone who has given me their time to be part of the project has really helped me a lot. I am so thankful for that and all of their advice.

I believe social services needs to provide young people more support. In the last few months, while I was doing this research I also interviewed young people who were in care before. All these people faced similar problems which have affected their mental and physical health.

I hope that my research and advice will help, and I hope you enjoy reading.

Becoming Independent



During my research I had many conversations with different social workers about young people's wellbeing, and one of my key themes to come out of the interviews was about transition to becoming independent. All young people experience emotional wellbeing challenges in different ways and a lot of this is about trying to stand up on your own in the world., I had this one conversation with "Alex" and she had mentioned that "it's quite a big issue really because for certain young people, I think they are shocked when they are leaving care because everything changes".

One question I asked another social worker was about how care leavers can get the most out of their personal advisor. She replied by saying "by engaging with the service" which was a excellent answer because it has to involve the young person seeking wanting to listen. I have realised that not all young people actually know what help they can receive, and not all young people actually take their time to read their local offer that's been given by their personal advisor. I believe if they truly understood what help they can get then they would engage with the services a lot more.

The reason why I feel this is important, and key part of becoming independent is because to be able to get this services and use it in the future you have to take that first step of engaging and taking advantages of the help available. This will come in useful in the future, for example if you want to go on a job hunt or make

applications which many young people struggle with. If you take advantage when you're at the age where you qualify as a care-leaver then in the future you will be prepared. In the future you will thank your past self for taking the small step of engaging with social services. As I advise to all young people – it's great to be independent by yourself and you will get far in life, but also do not be too arrogant to ask for help.

My top tip for care leavers to become independent would be to take advantage of the Local Offer that is provided by social services. As care-leavers we shouldn't be ashamed to use what's available to us for free – it's there for a reason because so we can get a chance to make something for ourselves that we didn't get in our childhood. I recommend reading the Local Offer very carefully so you will realise how much you are entitled to, and use this to benefit your future.

To find out about your Local Offer the best thing to do is ask your social worker/personal advisor and they will send it to you by either email or letter. I advise you to read it on your own if you understand, or you can arrange a meeting with your advisor to help you go through it with anything you don't understand.

A group of people, mostly young adults, are gathered around a long table covered with a white grid-patterned cloth. The table is filled with numerous clear plastic beakers and containers, some containing liquids. One person in the background is wearing a dark shirt with 'F.T.D.' on it. The scene is set in a room with large windows in the background, looking out onto a cityscape. The entire image has a teal/cyan color overlay. There are two white thought bubbles: a small one to the left of the main text bubble, and a larger one containing the text.

*Include fun and
creative activities
in your plan
for the future.*

Emotional Support



I believe that focusing on emotional wellbeing is important for everyone, not just for the young people I interviewed. I also spoke to two different professionals in the social sector who had different perspectives of the questions I asked.

I asked about how social workers are helped with their own emotional wellbeing. One of the interviewees mentioned that Social workers do receive ESA (Employment and Support Allowance) if cannot work due to illness, and they do also receive one-to-one support with their case manager to have catchups about their case-load and if anything is affecting their mental health. If so it is possible they can take time off.

Another social worker mentioned a bit differently saying she believes they don't receive enough help for their emotional wellbeing. They mentioned it depends on who their manager is - some are very supportive and give time to their colleague and have an actual chat with them about how they are doing and if they need any support. Some social workers however believe they can't talk to their manager so rely on colleagues they can open up to about their emotional wellbeing.

So I believe emotional wellbeing is very important for all ages and not just young people. Being a social worker is a challenging job and us as care leavers should see the bigger picture and recognise their hard work and see how much effort they put in just to help the young people get on their feet.

My top three ideas of how to get emotional support in Tower Hamlets.

Try to avoid illegal substances. The reason for that is in my experience it affected me so much with my emotional wellbeing. It went to a point where I couldn't sleep until I took something, and my mood would change very often, even over something very small. Drugs can destroy your health and that of the people around you. For you to get help to stop drug use your social worker can refer you to services that work with people with addictions.

Believe me, once you have given it up you would feel so much better about yourself and also save so much money that can be spent on useful things. My tip would be replacing the habit of drugs by keeping yourself busy throughout the day. What really helped me to stop is I got myself involved in training and religious activity in the community, which really helped me.

My personal advisor referred me to a service called Barnardos where they help young people with their emotional wellbeing. You may not want to talk to someone you know as you may think they would judge you, or you may be embarrassed talking about certain topics. I would also recommend having good friends around you that can be supportive. I would recommend cutting off negative friends as they will become a big issue in your life and would influence you to do the wrong things.

I found it hard to open up with my family and friends and especially to strangers about certain topics, this is normal as not everyone will feel comfortable speaking about their situation to health professions. The way I have overcome this is by going to my local mosque and speaking to the 'Imam' which made me feel better, and provided a lot of good advice on how to better myself, get on the right path, and help me reconnect with myself and making new friends. My tip is to do what makes you comfortable.

Making a Plan



A 'Pathway Plan' is a document created for young care leavers where your social worker will be outlining the support and steps needed to transition smoothly into adulthood. It helps ensure that you are equipped with the necessary skills, education, and emotional support to live independently.

The Plan is reviewed regularly, and adjustments are made according to your changing needs. It covers various areas such as employment, housing, finances, and healthcare. The reason why I believe this is important for care leavers, especially those who have just left care, is that it is a chance we can be heard and help plan support that we need and our journey ahead.

Pathway Plans are made depending on your circumstances, but usually every six months by your social worker / personal advisor. They will usually give you an update and arrange a home visit to carry out the Pathway Plan in action which they will go through with you and talk about your educational needs, housing, and physical wellbeing.

As I mentioned above this makes a great plan for the future and gives us the opportunity to speak out. If we have any problems we are facing they can be added and we can work towards getting these solved along the way.

I would highly recommend everyone who is in, or has been in care should engage with their social worker /personal advisor when their pathway plan is taking

place, because this will help you in the long run as you grow up. In the plan you can speak about your hopes and aspirations, you can speak about your housing options, and you can speak about if you want to get into training or education.

A while ago I was having my Pathway Plan meeting. I was twenty-four at the time so just still a care leaver, and due to my circumstances my personal advisor was helping me with my problems. I still remember till this day when we first met my personal advisor she told me "our goal will be getting your bidding number for your housing".

I wasn't too keen to believe that it would happen, and did not have much faith in myself or even with the service, but long story short my personal advisor actually achieved her goal as well as mine and it kind of got me thinking about how she has solved many of my problems within a short amount of time.

This gave me the motivation to want to help other young people, as I saw the way she worked with me and I feel like this is something I would like to get into and help other young people. Hopefully one day I may be able to help, advise and guide them to make their own plan for the future.

*Doing sport is
good for both your
physical and
mental health.*



Staying Well



Wellbeing refers to a person's overall health, happiness and quality of life. There are different types of wellbeing, including emotional wellbeing and physical wellbeing.

In Tower Hamlets, the annual health report shows that between 2020-21 over a quarter of children were growing up in relative low income families, and this is very high compared to the London average of 16.6% and the average across England of 18.5% (Tower Hamlets Annual Public Health Report 2022, Page 38). This can have an effect on the family's emotional wellbeing and physical wellbeing due to not having enough money to be able to feed their family. A lot of people locally will have a consistent feeling of being worried about money problems which can also lead to anxiety and things like kids resorting to doing drugs or even selling drugs to make money.

The reason why I think physical health and emotional health are linked together is that, for example, smoking cannabis can affect your health physically such as lung damage or even brain development and you can become dependent on using it to go to sleep or release stress. This links to emotional health because I believe smoking addiction can lead to depression, low moods and even taking your anger out on someone due to not smoking at some point of the day.

There are many programmes and activities young people can attend such as sports and physical activities or the leisure centre/gym. I still remember

when I gave up smoking cannabis. It was one day before starting Ramadan in 2024 and ever since that day I have never touched it. One tip I can give is that what really helped me was blocking the numbers of those who might tempt me, and avoiding being around those who smoking. This made it easier to stop as it is all about having self control.

Now it is 2025 and Ramadan once again. My plan is to stop smoking cigarettes and recently I have joined a stop smoking clinic which is a programme I saw when working on this project at the Town Hall. The stop smoking clinic is an 8-week programme where they will stay in touch with you and help you with your progress. At first they will take your details and make an appointment with you either face-to-face or on the telephone (which you can decide), and once they have completed your assessment they will send you either a free vape kit with nicotine flavours or it can be patches etc. For me achieving this is my current challenge.

Everyone will have their own way to find their support. I have explained my experiences of the support I have taken that has helped me, and I believe that every individual can find support that they will be comfortable with, whether that is the church, council, imam or their family and friends.

*Everyone needs
to find their own
support network that
works for them.*



Conclusions



There was a time when I always used to wonder what I was doing with my life. I didn't have much education or qualifications and the only work I could get was in warehouses or factories through agency work with zero hour contracts. I wasn't very stable in my life and I was struggling to get the support I needed. But by seeking help, engaging with that which is available to me, speaking to my imam, and joining training like this citizen science programme, I am now working towards my goals.

Throughout this project there were lots of challenges, the biggest for me was trying to keep up with writing my notes as I was doing interviews with the social workers. What was most enjoyable, and maybe surprising to me, was that the information I heard in those interviews with social workers has also helped me personally, in addition to being great for my project.

My hope for the future is that my work will help a lot of young people across Tower Hamlets. I hope to one day be able to work through my goals and become a personal advisor or work with young people, helping them to get on education, work or training, and guide them on the right path to becoming the best version of themselves for the future.



With the lads and my Imam, who have all been very supportive of me. We all need to find our own support network that works for us. That way we can achieve our goals.

*Scan here to listen to me
talk about why I chose
to do this project:*



*Scan here to listen to an
audio documentary I made
with some social workers
about their perspective:*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was honored to work alongside with UCL as a citizen scientist on this project. At first I had no idea what this was about but as time went on I figured it out and knew exactly what I was supposed to do.

I would like to give my blessing to Joseph and Twinkle who guided me throughout and had faith in me throughout my time in this project.



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To learn more about the wider Act Early project that this citizen science work is a part of, please visit -

www.actearly.org.uk

To learn more about the UCL Citizen Science Academy, and read more outputs from this project, please visit -

www.prosperity-global.org/citizen-science-academy

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ACT EARLY | CITIZEN SCIENCE WITH CARE LEAVERS | 2024-2025

This publication was created as part of a citizen social science project led by the UCL Citizen Science Academy, based at the Institute for Global Prosperity, University College London. It was funded by, and part of, Act Early, an ambitious five-year collaboration between researchers in London and Bradford, partners from the statutory, voluntary, cultural and commercial sectors, and local communities. Act Early seeks to promote a healthier, fairer future for children living in deprived areas through a focus on improving environments that influence health and life chances.

UCL Citizen Science Academy, supported by the Public Health team and Supporting Families division at Tower Hamlets Council, developed a three month training programme covering research ethics, methods and project planning, and supporting six local care-leavers (those aged 18-25 who have experience of the care system) to carry out qualitative research connected to health and wellbeing issues they felt were of importance.

The citizen scientists were compensated throughout as part of the research team, and awarded the UCL Citizen Science Certificate on completion of six bespoke assignments. Pastoral support was provided by Tower Hamlets Council, and particular thanks should be given to Saly Begum, the council's Education, Training and Employment Coordinator for care leavers.

The UCL Citizen Science Academy and Act Early teams would like to thank the citizen scientists graduating from this course for their commitment, good humour, and supportive behaviour towards one another. Even though this was only a short course, the life of a care leaver can be a challenging one. Over half of the group were rehoused during the three months, and balancing a training course with the shift to independent living provides a myriad of uncertainties that were overcome.

Care-experience individuals, amongst other groups that Act Early have engaged with, are often termed by researchers as 'hard-to-reach'. In this research I hope we have shown that, when institutions are flexible enough, 'reaching' them is not just perfectly possible, it is in fact greatly beneficial. We hope that you have enjoyed their work.



For more zines by our citizen scientists, please visit
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